

Stick with 'The Missiles of October'

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NEW YORK (AP) — Three hours may seem a long time to stick with one TV show, but give it a try tonight with ABC's "The Missiles of October." It'll be three hours well spent.

The show dramatizes the reactions of American and Russian leaders during the 13-day Cuban missile crisis of 1962,

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when the U.S. learned Soviet crews were installing offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba.

I've no doubt that historians will have a field day picking apart the program — scriptwriter Stanley Greenberg insists the show is of the "theater of fact" breed of drama — but no matter.

"Missiles" as an entertainment effort is a consistently engrossing show which largely succeeds in conveying the atmosphere of those tense, awful days when the world was at the brink of nuclear war.

Much of the credit for this has to go to two actors, William Devane and Martin Sheen, respectively cast as President John F. Kennedy and his brother, U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy.

They do a remarkable job in suggesting, without mimicry, the way the brothers talked and acted in their dealings with each other, the National Security Council's executive committee

and the Soviets.

Veteran character actor Howard da Silva, cast as Nikita Khrushchev, seems less convincing and not quite as forceful as the late Russian leader appeared in real life. But he still turns in a good performance.

"Missiles" occasionally interjects old newsreels of Russian and American atomic bomb tests and U.S. military forces readying for possible war during the most tense moments of the Cuban missile crisis.

But the bulk of the drama is played out

at the White House, where high-level debate on "surgical" air strikes against missile sites, a ground invasion of Cuba, a naval blockade of Cuba, and what could and couldn't be negotiated with Russia is depicted.

As I've said, historians undoubtedly will dispute some of the scenes, but watch all the show anyway. It revives a moment in history all of us should study time and again.

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